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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

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HAD the many wiſe philoſophers of antiquity, who have ſo often and ſo juſtly compared the life of man to a race, lived in the preſent times, they would have ſeen the propriety of that ſimile greatly augmented: for if we obſerve the behaviour of the polite part of this nation (that is, of *all* the nation) we ſhall ſee that their whole lives are one continued race; in which every one is endeavouring to diſtance all behind him, and to overtake, or paſs by, all who are before him; every one is flying from his inferiors in purſuit of his ſuperiors, who fly from Him with equal alacrity.

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WERE not the conſequences of this ridiculous pride of the moſt deſtructive nature to the public, the ſcene would be really entertaining. Every tradeſman is a merchant, every merchant is a gentleman, and every gentleman one of the nobleſs. We are a nation of gentry, *populus generoſorum*: we have no ſuch thing as common people amongſt us: between vanity and gin, the ſpecies is utterly deſtroyed. The ſons of our loweſt mechanics, acquiring with their learning at charity-ſchools, the laudable ambition of becoming gentle-folks, deſpiſe their paternal occupations, and are all ſoliciting for the honourable employments of tidewaiters and exciſemen. Their girls are all milliners, mantua makers, or lady's women; or preſumptuouſly exerciſe that genteel profeſſion, which uſed to be peculiarly reſerved for the well-educated daughters of deceaſed clergymen. Attorneys clerks and city prentices dreſs like cornets of dragoons, keep their miſtreſſes and their hunters, criticiſe at the play, and toaſt at the tavern. The merchant leaves his compting-houſe for St. James's; and the country-gentleman his own affairs for thoſe of the public, by which neither of them receive much benefit. Every commoner of diſtinction is impatient for a peerage, and treads hard upon the heels of quality in dreſs, equipage and expences of every kind. The nobility, who can aim no higher, plunge themſelves into debt and dependance, to preſerve their rank; and are even there quickly overtaken by their unmerciful purſuers.

THE ſame fooliſh vanity, that thus prompts us to imitate our ſuperiors, induces us alſo to be, or to pretend to be, their inſeparable companions; or, as the phraſe is, to keep the *beſt company*; by which is always to be underſtood, ſuch company as are much above us in rank

rank or fortune, and conſequently deſpiſe and avoid us, in the ſame manner as we ourſelves do our inferiors. By this ridiculous affectation are all the pleaſures of ſocial life, and all the advantages of friendly converſe utterly deſtroyed. We chuſe not our companions for their wit or learning, their good humour or good-ſenſe, but for their power of conferring this imaginary dignity; as if greatneſs was communicable, like the powers of the load-ſtone, by friction, or by contact, like electricity. Every young gentleman is taught to believe it is more eligible, and more honourable, to deſtroy his time, his fortune, his morals and his underſtanding at a gaming-houſe with the *beſt company*, than to improve them all in the converſation of the moſt ingenious, and entertaining of his equals: and every ſelf-conceited girl, in faſhionable life, chuſes rather to endure the affected ſilence and inſolent head-ach of my lady ducheſs for a whole evening, than to paſs it in mirth and jollity with the moſt amiable of her acquaintance. For ſince it is poſſible that ſome of my readers, who have not had the honour of being admitted into the *beſt company*, ſhould imagine that amongſt ſuch there is ever the beſt converſation, the moſt lively wit, the moſt profound judgment, the moſt engaging affability and politeneſs; it may be proper to inform them, that this is by no means always the caſe; but that frequently in ſuch company little is ſaid, and leſs attended to; no diſpoſition appears either to pleaſe others, or to be pleaſed themſelves; but that in the room of all the before-mentioned agreeable qualifications, cards are introduced, endued with the convenient power of reducing all men's underſtandings, as well as their fortunes, to an equality.

It is pleaſant to obſerve how this race, converted into a kind of perpetual warfare between the *good* and *bad company* in this country, has ſubſiſted for half a century laſt paſt; in which the former have been perpetually purſued by the latter, and fairly beaten out of all their reſources for ſuperior diſtinction; out of innumerable faſhions in dreſs, and variety of diverſions, every one of which they have been obliged to abandon, as ſoon as occupied by their impertinent rivals. In vain have they armed themſelves with lace and embroidery, and intrenched themſelves in hoops and furbelows: in vain have they had recourſe to full-bottomed perriwigs, and toupees; to high heads, and low-heads, and no heads at all: trade has beſtowed riches on their competitors, and riches have procured them equal finery. Hair has curled as genteely on one ſide of Temple-bar, as on the other, and hoops have grown to as prodigious a magnitude in the foggy air of Cheapſide, as in the purer regions of Groſvenor-ſquare and Hill-ſtreet.

With as little ſucceſs have opera's oratorio's, ridotto's and other expenſive diverſions been invented to exclude *bad company*: tradeſmen, by enhancing their prices, have found tickets for their wives and daughters, and by this means have been enabled to inſult the *good company*, their cuſtomers, at their own expence: and, like true conquerors, have obliged the enemy to pay for their defeat. But this ſtratagem has in ſome meaſure been obviated by the prudence of the *very beſt company*, who, for this, and many other wiſe conſiderations, have uſually declined paying them at all.

For many years was this combat between the *good* and *bad company* of this metropolis performed, like the ancient tilts and tournaments, before his Majeſty and the royal

royal family, every friday night in the drawing room at St James's; which now appears, as it uſually fares with the ſeat of war, deſolate and uninhabited, and totally deſerted by both ſides: except that on a twelfth night the *bad company* never fail to aſſemble, to commemorate annually the victories they have there obtained.

The *good company* being thus every where put to flight, they thought proper at laſt to retire to their own citadels; that is, to form numerous and brilliant aſſembles at their own hotels, in which they imagined, that they could neither be imitated, nor intruded on. But here again they were grievouſly miſtaken; for no ſooner was the ſignal given, but every little lodging-houſe in town, of two rooms and a cloſet on a floor, or rather of two cloſets and a cupboard, teemed with card-tables, and overflowed with company: and as making a crowd was the great point here principally aimed at, the ſmaller the houſes, and the more indifferent the company, this point was the more eaſily affected. Nor could intruſion be better guarded againſt, than imitation; for by ſome means or other, either by the force of beauty or of dreſs, of wealth or impudence, of folly enough to loſe great ſums at play, or of knavery enough to win them, or of ſome ſuch eminent and extraordinary qualifications, their plebeian enemies ſoon broke through the ſtrongeſt of their barriers, and mingled in the thickeſt of their ranks, to the utter deſtruction of all ſuperiority and diſtinction.

But though it muſt be owned that the affairs of the *good company* are now in a very bad ſituation, yet I would not have them deſpair, nor perpetually carry about the marks of their defeat in their countenances, ſo viſible in a mixture of *fierté* and dejection. They have ſtill one

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